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THE CHURCH IN RELATION TO NON-CHRISTIAN CULTURES

[This is the substance of an address given by Mr. Kitagawa, Federated Theological Faculty, field of History of Religions, in a student-faculty conference in the Federated Theological Schools held in April. Mr. Kitagawa has kindly revised his original statement for publication in this issue of the *News*.—EDITOR.]

I HAVE been asked to discuss the meaning of the church in relation to non-Christian cultures. I do not pretend to have answers to the many complex questions involved, but it may be helpful if we can develop a perspective from which we should approach these questions.

Probably two factors are of primary importance in a discussion of the church in relation to non-Christian cultures: (1) we live in a period of transition and must, therefore, re-examine the meaning of the church in the changing world order and (2) the so-called younger churches—that is, the Christian communities in traditionally non-Christian countries—are maturing. These are integrally related, of course.

Toynbee has recently made two observations concerning the changing world order: (1) "the West has not been the only actor on the stage of modern history even at the peak of the West's power (and this peak has perhaps now already been passed)"; (2) "in the encounter between the world and the West that has been going on by now for four or five hundred years . . . it has not been the West that has been hit by the world; it is the world that has been hit—and hit hard—by the West."[1]

We may or we may not agree with Toynbee. However, it does not take a Toynbee to point out that the world is changing and that today we may be standing at the brink of a new age. Thus, the role and destiny of the church must be seen in the context of the changing world.

[1] Arnold Toynbee, *The World and the West* (New York & London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 1.

Two recent documents—one reflecting the view of the churches in the West, and another that of a younger church—may provide the framework for our discussion.

"CHANGED WORLD CONDITIONS" AS VIEWED BY WESTERN CHURCHES

A pamphlet, *The Missionary Task in the Present Day,* constitutes the report of Commission IV of the International Missionary Council.[2] For our purpose, the commission's report on the "Changed Conditions External to the Missions" (pp. 2–5) may be summarized under five headings.

First is the growth of the world's population. Not only do non-Christians far outnumber Christians in the world today, but the populations of non-Christian countries will continue to increase much more rapidly than those of Western nations. This is the inevitable result of industrialization which is in its beginning stages in the non-Christian world today. In other words, the Christian community will become an even smaller minority in the world as time goes on.

Second is the rapid termination of the colonial era. The end of the colonial era in most of Asia, and increasing revolts in Africa, indicate radical changes in these countries. "This has resulted in a skeptical rather than a receptive attitude toward the Christian religion which in the past relied consciously or unconsciously to a considerable extent on the general prestige of the nations and cultures from which its missionaries came" (p. 2).[3]

Third is the growth of nationalism and the reassertion of former cultural patterns in Asia. In a sense, the Orient has learned nationalism and the concept of the modern nation-state from the West. And today, in many parts of Asia, the state is taking over many of the educational and welfare functions which were formerly important means of Christian missions. With the decline of Western prestige in Asia has come the reassertion of former cultural patterns and traditional religions.

Fourth is the growth of Communist power in Asia. Indeed, communism has made marked gains throughout the world in the last ten years, and the commission notes that "the growth of Communist power until it dominates one-third of the world's population is a change of supreme concern to those responsible under God for the world mission of Christianity" (p. 3). The problem is complex in the non-Christian East, because the Communist view of history is opposed to all religions—Christian and non-Christian—unless

[2] Compiled by Wynn C. Fairfield, February 20, 1952.

[3] Cf. M. Searle Bates, *Annual Lectures at the School of Religion, Butler University,* p. 70.

these religions can be manipulated for political purposes. The dilemma of the church in this situation is whether to regard non-Christian religions as co-workers for the same cause—that is, spirituality or a religious world view—or as enemies who happen to be in the same predicament as the Christian church.

Fifth is the changed position of America in world affairs. The commission states: "The United States is now without question the wealthiest, potentially most powerful, most luxurious and most extravagant country on the globe, with a very large percentage of the world's wealth and direct or indirect control of a large part of its natural resources. This privileged position creates suspicion, fear, envy and hate even among beneficiaries of its use of power, as well as real gratitude among many of them. No person or nation enjoys or feels secure in a situation where livelihood and welfare are largely dependent on the goodwill of another, however well-intentioned that other may claim to be and often demonstrates itself to be" (pp. 3–4).

This is a very sketchy summary of the first part of the report. The commission also discusses "Changes within the World Mission Itself"—for example, (1) the changed status of the younger churches and their coming to maturity; (2) a growing interdependence among most of the Protestant forces of the world in thinking and action; (3) the changed status of the United States in the church around the world; and (4) the numerical weakening of the churches in Europe (pp. 6–9).

But the commission, in the section called "A Restatement of the Missionary Task in the Light of These Changes," does not adequately cope with the basic theological issues involved. To be sure, their restatement emphasizes the prophetic character of the Christian mission: "It must be on the offensive against injustice and wrong everywhere rather than on the defensive against Communism" (p. 11). But the commission fails to ask what we mean when we talk about the evangelization of the world, given the contemporary world situation set forth in the first half of the report. It is taken for granted that the world-wide Christian community as a whole will cooperate with and assist the younger churches in practical ways. But, this restatement gives the impression that the task of the Christian witness in non-Christian cultures is in the final analysis the sole responsibility of the younger churches.

How, then, do the younger churches view the task of the church in the world today?

REPORT OF A YOUNGER CHURCH

The second document I wish to call to your attention is the report of the Indian Ecumenical Study Conference, held at Nagpur, India, in October, 1952.[4] This conference prepared the way for the Asian Study Conference to be held in Lucknow next December under the auspices of the World Council of Churches; the Asian Study Conference itself is being convened in preparation for the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches to be held in Evanston in 1954. For these reasons the report of the Indian Ecumenical Study Conference may be regarded as a barometer of the younger churches in Asia. The Indian group took up for study and discussion four themes: (1) the Christian hope—Jesus Christ the Crucified and Risen Lord; (2) responsible society; (3) mission and unity; and (4) race relations.

For our purpose the most significant part of the report is that on the "responsible society," since it is concerned with the relation between the church and culture. The study group, after a brief survey of Catholicism in the Middle Ages, and the rise of Protestantism, capitalism, state power, and the middle class in recent Western history, writes:

> The revolutionary situation in which we find ourselves demands a new synthesis. But the social situation varies from country to country. Even in America, State interference has modified the old *laissez faire* capitalism; the welfare state in England has created a new set of problems, and the Communist countries yet others. In every case there has been a real rediscovery of the nature of the Church, both in its theological essence and also in a growing sense of responsibility for the whole of life—a new organic approach [p. 52].

With this goal in mind, the Indian group recognizes the "use of criticism as a necessary function of the Church's life and witness"—a critique both of capitalism and of collectivism. How to maintain a tension between authority and freedom in order to achieve a responsible society is the urgent question. Against this background, the Indian group sets forth seven important observations related to the "Indian situation."

1. *Social thought in the church.*—On the one hand, the commission is critical of Catholics who find it easy to criticize capitalism and yet resist social change, and, on the other hand, it is also critical of the middle-class attitude of Protestants. In short, "social thought in the Church is very retarded," and the most radical scrutiny of Indian social philosophy and a careful analysis of actual society of India are recommended (p. 53).

2. *Nature of the real conflict.*—"Communism is a symptom and not the disease itself. The real conflict is not in Communism *versus* capitalism but

[4] *The Indian Journal of Theology,* I, No. 2 (November, 1952), 41–65.

in the mechanization and psychological conditioning of man *versus* the responsible society" (p. 53).

3. *The unfinished revolution.*—India is in the transitional period from feudalism to modern society. As such, "India is bound to suggest to Western friends who had their more-or-less violent revolutions a century or so ago, that they should show some understanding of the social travail through which [India] is bound to pass for some time to come" (pp. 53–54).

4. *The impact of the technological age.*—The symptoms of the technological age—urbanization and political and economic centralization—are felt in all walks of Indian life. The city dwellers are "rootless, communityless and easily become prey to anti-social forces. . . . The political life and power of the country, its guiding ideas, its colleges, newspapers and dominant ideologies are fashioned in the cities where men have lost the sense of community. On the other hand, in rural areas, such forms of community as survive, are to a great extent relics of an earlier type of society and no longer fulfil their original purpose" (p. 54). The commission feels that the responsible society must involve the participation of the person, of the family, and of small groups and that it may be necessary to discourage the trend toward bigness.

5. *The need of voluntary associations.*—The nature of the responsible society is to be necessarily pluralistic, in the sense that there should be a series of vital, autonomous groups between the individual and the state.

6. *The problem of the secular state.*—The commission upholds the principle of "a secular state in which real religious freedom and real respect for the conscience are accepted by all" and feels that it is possible to have such a secular state in a deeply religious society. It is further stated: "If the secular state is to be a reality in India, Christians must not only demand full freedom for the propagation of the faith, but . . . Christians must learn to initiate activities and schemes for social welfare and social change which may be adopted by men of good will even if they do not accept the faith which inspires such activities" (p. 55).

7. *The need for experiment.*—In the light of the overwhelming social problems of India, such as mass poverty, the church must relate theology to social action.

If the responsible society is to be a reality, men must be responsible. This involves repentance and a reorientation of life which has a social as well as a moral or personal content. . . . In this respect trade unions or peasant unions can be of immense spiritual

significance, but it is essential to develop an effective working class leadership, and this means that one of the most important forms of activity in which a Christian can take part is working class education so that workers may be increasingly equipped not only to fight for their rights, but to play a significant part in the transformation of the country. . . . We need to develop something equivalent to the movement of the priest workmen in France where preaching or evangelism is preceded by identification with life situations. It is only from below that the situation may be transformed. This will only happen when men are filled with the spirit of the incarnate Christ who for our sake became poor and dwelt among us [pp. 55–56].

A BASIC ISSUE

In contrast to the thoroughgoing character of the findings on the responsible society, the discussion of the theological issues in the same report is disappointing. One might characterize the whole report as a mixture of personal evangelism and alert social consciousness. (The section on "The Calling of the Church to Mission and Unity" states forcefully the principles which nurtured the Church of South India; no comment is needed on this score, because this story is well known in the West.)

The report on "the Christian hope" takes pains to distinguish two types of history: the biblical record as a narrative of a history within history and the normal natural history. "History itself," says the commission, "has not the seeds of redemption embedded within itself." Redemption of history is possible only by the redemptive intervention of God into history, such as we find in the Exodus, the Exile, and the return from the Exile. Further, "incarnation creates history within history. Incarnation is both an acceptance of history and rejection of it" (p. 44).

Then the commission criticizes the Hindu view of history on the ground that it has only a pragmatic reality. "Reality in itself to the Advaitin, at least, is impersonal with no conscious activity of its own; it is changeless and immutable." Because history is a scene of activity, and because activity is contrary to the nature of reality, so the commission argues, the Hindu view of history has only a pragmatic reality. Furthermore, "creation is due to the Lila of God, a sportive impulse in Him. While Lila does not imply meaningless playfulness, it expresses the Hindu shyness in ascribing to God purposiveness in creation" (p. 47).

It appears as though these native Christian theologians in India are too eager to compare the Judeo-Christian understanding of God and the Hindu interpretation of God. But in Hinduism, reality and deities cannot be equated, for deities are subject to the cosmic force. Thus, any comparison

between the Christian and Hindu interpretations of the term "God" is not at all meaningful.

It is further stated that: "on the whole man's duty [in Hinduism] is to turn away from history, to escape from the cycle of births and deaths and gain Mukti—release. The proper Hindu view then is complete historical pessimism and transcendent or other worldly optimism." Thus, according to these native Christians' view, the contemporary political, economic, and social aspirations of Hindus cannot be motivated by nonhistorical Hinduism but "have their roots in a secular and humanistic culture that is the result of education in Western thought and science" (p. 48).

This situation is not confined to the church in India. Many of the younger churches find themselves in multidimensional revolutions not unlike India's. How, then, are we as Christians to interpret such vital political, economic, and social drives as are manifested in these countries? Are they motivated primarily by Western humanistic culture or by non-Christian culture and religion? The report of the Indian Ecumenical Study Group takes the former view, which is shared by many vocal Christians in the East today.

However, the second alternative warrants equally serious investigation. It is becoming increasingly clear to historians of religions that each religion is a whole in itself and that the character of any religion must be seen not only in its classical form but in its contemporary aspect as well. To be sure, Hinduism and Buddhism, for example, have been strongly influenced by Western culture and Christianity in recent years, but the fact remains they did not cease to be Hinduism and Buddhism. And these renewed and revitalized non-Christian religions are playing significant roles in restructuring culture and society in the East today. Thus, it may be more accurate to say that the real conflict, from the Christian point of view, is between the Christian interpretation of history and a revitalized non-Christian interpretation of history. This is the concern not only of the younger churches but of the church as a whole.

Today, the younger churches tend to live in cultural islands, and they tend to act as though the cultural and historical experiences of the East are meaningless. This is understandable, considering the background of the first-generation native Christians. Most of them were converted to Christianity when the East first encountered Western culture. At that time, they were conscious of the disintegration of Eastern culture from within; to them Christianity was literally the gospel, socially and culturally as well as religiously.

During the last hundred years, the Eastern world, which has been erroneously called the "unchanging East," has undergone rapid and complex changes. And, in the meantime, second-, third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation native Christians have come into being. These native Christians, born and reared in Christian communities in traditionally non-Christian cultures, have experienced and are experiencing serious social, psychological, and religious tensions, especially in the light of the recent strong reassertions of non-Christian religions and the rise of nationalism. As the Indian Christians state: "Having never been in the habit of concerning itself with contemporary social affairs, and therefore not having been educated to relate its message to contemporary events . . . [the younger church] stands today as an ineffective spectator of the contemporary scene" (p. 48).

Some time ago, in one part of Asia, two missionaries were walking together. Suddenly, they came in sight of a pagan temple under construction. "Ah!" said one of them with a note of disgust, "I hate to see that! Another fortress of the enemy."

"Well," said the second missionary, "I'm not so sure! I would be rather inclined to say: another witness to man's search for God—and thank God for it."[5] And the church as a whole must think of the serious implications of these attitudes.

Today, we can no longer afford to ignore the problems which concern any part of the church. From now on, the Christian church will not be able to make an impact on the non-Christian world through institutional approaches —medical, educational, and social welfare works.

The church in the new age must address herself to the non-Christian cultures: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee" (Acts 3:6).

JOSEPH M. KITAGAWA

FEDERATED THEOLOGICAL FACULTY
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

[5] Quoted by E. C. Dewick in *The Christian Attitude to Other Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952).

NOTES FROM THE DEAN'S OFFICE

At the Winter Convocation, March 20, 1953, the following degrees were conferred:

Doctor of Philosophy:

ROBERT EMIL KOENIG
S.B., University of Chicago, 1941
D.D., Chicago Theological Seminary, 1945

Master of Arts:

CHARLES GERALD DICKIESON
A.B., University of Toronto, 1949
B.D., University of Chicago, 1952

THURMAN ROOSEVELT POSTON, JR.
A.B., Catawba College, 1945
B.D., Thelogical Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, 1947

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

HOPPER, STANLEY ROMAINE. *Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature.* New York: Harper & Bros., 1952. Institute for religion and social studies. "Religion and Civilization" series.

OWEN, D. R. G. *Scientism, Man, and Religion.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952.

SALINGER, J. D. *Nine Stories.* New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1953.

TERRIEN, SAMUEL. *The Psalms.* New York and Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1952.

WARD, A. DUDLEY (ed.). *Goals of Economic Life.* New York: Harper & Bros., 1953. One of series on "Ethics and Economic Life" of the National Council of Churches of Christ in America.

WIDGERY, ALBAN G. *What Is Religion?* New York: Harper & Bros., 1953.

YOUNG, PHILIP. *Ernest Hemingway.* New York: Rinehart & Co., 1952.

STUDENT EXTERN PROGRAM AT FOUNTAIN STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

Eleven students from the Federated Theological Schools of the University attended the third Student Extern Program of the Fountain Street Baptist Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, March 20–22.

This program, inaugurated by the Fountain Street Church approximately two years ago, gives an opportunity to theological students to study the program and work of a large urban parish in its local setting, to discuss the problems of the ministry, pastoral work, religious education, and church planning with the church staff, and to participate in discussions with the lay leadership of the church. There is also opportunity to meet with students from other schools. This year students were present from the Oberlin School of Theology.

The local church has generously provided the total expenses for the students for these programs, and members of the church have graciously received the students as guests in their homes during the Extern Programs.

Duncan E. Littlefair, Ph.D. '40, Bob Britt Hauserman, ex-'43, and Verdi L. Reusser are ministers of the Fountain Street Church.

ALUMNI NEWS

Alexander Winston, B.D. '35, Meadville, and most recently pastor of First Parish, Portland, Maine, has been called to New Haven's historic United Church on the Green. A University of Washington Ph.D., and former teacher of philosophy in Tufts College, Mr. Winston is the author of two books: *You Are the Key,* published in 1949, and *I Leave You My Heart,* published in 1951. Two of his sermons were included in the 1951–52 edition of Macmillan's *Best Sermons.*

Emerson O. Bradshaw, B.D. '12, author of *Unconquerable Kagawa,* a Macalester Park publication, 1952, is now living in retirement in Clearwater, Florida. Mr. Bradshaw retired from the Church Federation of Greater Chicago in 1946. In 1950 he made an extensive travel and lecture tour with Toyohiko Kagawa, on which his book is based. In the meantime he has done other interim work but is now "writing some and doing some speaking" and enjoying early spring gardening at his Florida home.

Charles J. Curtis, M.A. '47, minister of the Luther Church in San Lorenzo, California, has accepted a call to the pastorate of the Bethel Lutheran Church, Englewood, Chicago, beginning June 1. During the two and one-half years Mr. Curtis has been minister in San Lorenzo a new congregation has been organized and a new church building constructed.

William Paul Barnds, B.D. '40, became rector of St. James' Episcopal Church, South Bend, Indiana, on February 1. For nine years he was rector of St. Matthew's Church in Lincoln, Nebraska, before taking up his present ministry in South Bend.

Frederick C. Prussner, Ph.D. '51, will join the faculty of Candler School of Theology, Emory University, beginning September 1. He will teach in the field of Old Testament.

Eugene S. Tanner, Ph.D. '24, University of Tulsa, is working on a book on the Johannine Epistles. Through an error in the February 1 issue of the *Divinity School News,* Dr. Harold R. Willoughby was reported doing this work.

Charles F. Kraft, Ph.D. '37, now professor of Old Testament in Garrett Biblical Institute, is secretary of the Middle West Section of the American Oriental Society.

Harold H. Platz, ex-'44, professor of New Testament in Bonebrake Theological Seminary, is secretary of the Midwest Division of the Society of Biblical Literature.

David J. Wieand, Ph.D. '46, professor of New Testament in Bethany Theological Seminary, is secretary of the Chicago Society for Biblical Research.

Earl Riney, B.D. '14, is the author of *Family Life in Focus,* released April 27, by the Broadman Press, Nashville. Dr. William H. Leach, editor of *Church*

Management, has written the Introduction to the book. The Reverend Mr. Riney is now retired from the active pastorate and is living in Kansas City, Missouri, where for several years he was pastor of the Roanoke Baptist Church.

Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., Ph.D. '37, professor of church history in the Episcopal Theological School of Cambridge, Massachusetts, is at present on a sabbatical leave from his academic duties. He is doing research work in Rome and Vatican City.

Emory University has recently organized a graduate Institute of Liberal Arts. Ernest C. Colwell, Ph.D. '30, is the director of the Institute. A member of the staff of the Institute, responsible for the development of biblical studies, is William A. Beardslee, Ph.D. '51.

Among the contributors to Volume X of the *Interpreters Bible* are Raymond Stamm, Ph.D. '27, of Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and Francis W. Beare, Ph.D. '45, Trinity College, Toronto, Canada. They have contributed the introductions and exegesis for Galatians and Ephesians, respectively.

Willis E. Elliot, ex-'45, is now minister of the Community Church, Morton, Illinois. Over thirty different denominations are represented in the membership of the church. The minister and community are currently experimenting extensively in various forms of common Christian worship.

The following alumni are serving in American higher education as indicated: Daryl Chase, A.M. '31, is president of Branch Agricultural College, Cedar City, Utah; Russel Swenson, Ph.D. '34, is head of the history department in Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; George S. Tanner, A.M. '31, is director of the LDS Institute of Religion, Moscow, Idaho, location of the state University of Idaho.

Charles Braden, Ph.D. '26, retires September 1 from the chair of the Department of History and Literature of Religion, Northwestern University. He has been asked to continue as lecturer for the year 1953–54.

John F. C. Green, A.M. '17, minister of the Evangelical Congregational Church, McKeesport, Pennsylvania, with his bride of the Christmas season, was on an extended tour of Europe the first of this year. Following his marriage on December 28, he and Mrs. Green made a flight to Europe where their vows were repeated in the Sieseby church, Germany, where the groom was confirmed many years ago before his emigration to America. A reception was given Mr. and Mrs. Green in the Masonic Hall in Eckernfoerd. On January 4, Mr. Green preached in the Borby church for Pastor Meier. Of his visit in Germany, Mr. Green reports: "It was shocking to learn the realism of the narrow margin of livelihood that keeps these people. Prices are high, wages are low, and unemployment is very high."

Merrill C. Davis, ex-'48, has accepted a position on the faculty of Westmar College, Le Mars, Iowa, and will assume his duties there in the Department of Religion in September.

ATTENTION ALUMNI!

Help us to make our alumni records more complete. The Alumni Association urges every alumnus to send information about himself or other alumni. Please fill in this blank and return it to the Office of Extension, Divinity School, University of Chicago.

Name.....Address.....

U. of C. degrees.....Year.....

Other degrees.....Institutions.....Year.....

Mailing address.....

New pastorate or other position.....

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Book published.....

Election to position of honor or responsibility.....

Interesting project recently accomplished.....

Any other information of interest.....

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